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Mr. BALCH's  
S E R M O N  
Before the  
Convention,

May 29. 1760.



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Simplicity and godly Sincerity,  
in a Christian Minister, the  
sure Way to Happiness. 4

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A  
S E R M O N

PREACHED BEFORE

The *annual* CONVENTION of  
MINISTERS, in BOSTON, N. E.

May 29. 1760.

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By *William Balch*, A. M. *k*  
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A

*Convention* S E R M O N.



II. Cor. i. 12.

*For our rejoicing is this, the Testimony of our Conscience, that in Simplicity and godly Sincerity, not with fleshly Wisdom, but by the Grace of God, we have had our Conversation in the World, and more abundantly to you-wards.*

**S**Aint Paul, who writes this *Epistle* to justify his Ministry, had, no Doubt, therein a primary View to the Honour of Christ and the Advancement of his Kingdom ; for, being a good Man and a firm Believer, his Heart was warmly engaged in the Cause of Christianity ; and that he might be

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be further serviceable to restore its Purity and promote its Success at *Corinth*, where it was already corrupted and in Danger of being lost, it was necessary that his own Character, as a Christian Minister, should be set in a just and clear Light before that Church. Therefore, he applies himself, with Diligence, to wipe off the various Aspersions that were cast upon him ; and particularly, as it was asserted by a Party *there*, that he was a selfish crafty Man, who was artfully prosecuting some deep Design of worldly Interest. In Opposition hereto, he asserts, in the Text, his Freedom from any such Design, the Uprightness of his Intentions, the Openness and Simplicity of his whole Behaviour, and his Sincerity before God,

The Words are thus introduced.—Having Occasion to mention a *Trouble* that had befallen him, he affectionately blesses God, that it enabled him to comfort the *Corinthians* by the Example both of his Affliction and Deliverance. He presumes that he had the Benefit of their Prayers upon this Occasion, and that they gave God Thanks for his Escape : The Foundation of his Confidence, in which Respect, was *the Testimony of his Conscience, that, in Simplicity and godly Sincerity, not with fleshly Wisdom but by the Grace of God, he had had his Conversation in the World ;* and more especially

especially towards the *Corinthians*.——And as the Apostle's Behaviour, here described, (to the Truth of which Conscience is his Witness) is that Kind of Behaviour which it infinitely concerns every Christian Minister to *imitate*; and as the Joy and Comfort which, he tells us, he found in that Kind of Life, affords the strongest *Motive* to such Imitation, I could not think of a more instructive and useful Passage, whereon to entertain my present Reverend and Learned Audience.

My own Insufficiency to treat the Subject as it deserves, I freely confess; yet, if you will suffer me to be your Monitor, and hear with the same Spirit of Candour, and with the same View to the divine Approbation, with which I desire to speak, I hope it will not be Time lost.

I shall not branch out into many Particulars, my Aim being not so much to instruct, as to stir up the Minds of my Fathers and Brethren in the Ministry, already stored with the Principles of religious Truth, to a serious devout Resolution, and an earnest affectionate Improvement of the Things which we all acknowledge to be of the greatest Weight and Moment.

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Without the Approbation of the Supreme Being, *the God in whose Hand our Breath is, and whose are all our Ways* ; or, which comes to the same Thing, — Without the Approbation of our Great Lord and Master JESUS CHRIST, the appointed *Head over all Things to the Church*, whose Ministers we are, and unto whom we must shortly give an Account of the Ministry we have received, and of our Manner of fulfilling it ; without such Approbation, I say, we cannot be happy : And this we can in no Wise promise ourselves upon any good and sufficient Grounds, unless we have, in the first Place, the Approbation of our own Minds and Consciences upon our Behaviour and Conduct. For, as the Apostle *John* speaks, [*Jo. iii. 20, &c.*] *If our Heart condemn us, God is greater than our Heart, and knoweth all Things ; but if our Heart condemn us not, then have we Confidence towards God.* If our Heart condemn us for Insincerity, for acting a Part, and having our main View, not to the divine Acceptance, but the Applause, or other Advantages, we may receive from our Fellow-Men, our Case is very sad ; but if, on the other Hand, it witness for us, as *St. Paul's* did for him, that our Conversation in the World, and particularly in the Ministry, is not under the Influence of fleshly Wisdom, but is such as we are directed to, and assisted in



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in, by the Grace of God, this is a Foundation for Joy, for Trust and Confidence towards God.

Let me then lay before you, in a few Particulars,

- I. The *Manner of Conversation* that can only be approved of by Conscience, in a Christian Minister.
- II. The *Rejoicing* that a Foundation is laid for, by the Discharge of our Christian and Ministerial Duty in a sincere Manner, attested by Conscience.

I. *The Manner of Conversation that can only be approved of by Conscience, in a Christian Minister, in two or three Particulars. And here,*

1. We must, with a View to our own Information, impartially and diligently study the *Word of God*, or the Revelation which he has made of his Will. We must, with open free unbiaſſed Minds, attend to This, as the Rule we are to walk by; and remember, that the very Business our *Commission* points out to us, and in which alone Christ has promised to favour us with his *Preſence*, is *teaching* his Disciples to *observe all those Things which He*

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*has*



*has commanded [Mat. xxviii. 20.] And we cannot do this without being informed what they are ; nor may any Information, in this Case, be safely relied on, without consulting the authentic Account of all that Jesus both did and taught ; which we have set before us in the Writings of the New Testament, that believing, teaching, and behaving accordingly, we might have Life through his Name.*

If God has made a *Revelation* of his Will, and we know where to find it, our own Reason will tell us, that this is to be a Law to us ; and that the first Duty it binds us to, is a careful diligent Examination of its Contents : And this is more especially incumbent on Ministers, who, *of all Men*, should be furthest off both from Ignorance and implicit Faith ; whose *Lips should preserve Knowledge*, that they who have not the same Opportunities and Advantages for Studies, *at least*, of this Kind, may enquire the Law at their Mouth. *If the blind lead the blind*, says our Saviour, *both shall fall into the Ditch. Ye are the Light of the World*, says he, to those whom he was sending forth to preach his Gospel. They must be *Men of Understanding* ; for they are to feed their Hearers with Knowledge and Understanding.

Agreeably, St. Paul's Advice to Timothy, a Christian Teacher, was, *Give Attendance to*

*to Reading—Neglect not the Gift that is in thee—Meditate upon these Things: Give thyself wholly to them. — Take Heed unto thyself, and unto thy Doctrine; for in doing this, thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee.*

[1 Tim. iv. 13, &c.] He must study the sacred *Scriptures*, and make them his constant Meditation: He must inviolably adhere to the *Form of sound Words* exhibited therein; conforming both his Life and Doctrine thereto with the greatest Care and Diligence. And if a Minister, inattentive to this Advice, and not regarding the solemn Importance of it, but carelessly presuming that others who have gone before him, have searched the *Scriptures*, and made no material Mistakes; and so have saved him the Trouble; if a Minister, I say, shall thus presume, and hereupon chuse to indulge his Ease and take Things upon Trust; however such an one may secure his Reputation and temporal Interest, he will be far from having discharged a good Conscience, and will lie open to very dangerous Consequences. He is in great and continual Danger, if not of erring fundamentally from the Truth, yet of entertaining such wrong and mistaken Apprehensions, as will be very prejudicial both to himself and them that hear him. He is in Danger of building a great Deal of *Wood, Hay and Stubble*, though he should build upon the true Foundation; and when *the Day comes that shall try*

*try every Man's Work of what Sort it is, of suffering Loss ; the Loss at least of his Works, though he himself should be saved as by Fire.* [1 Cor. iii. 12.] In a Word, such a one is in Danger, by falling in too hastily with received Tenets, before he has well examined their Truth, both of doing and teaching Things, for which his own Conscience shall afterwards reproach him. We have an Instance of this, in the Man who was afterwards the great St. Paul. While his Prejudice in Favour of the Jewish Religion kept him from attending to Evidence in Favour of Christianity, " he verily thought with himself that he ought to do many Things contrary to the Name of Jesus of Nazareth;" [Acts xxvi. 9, 10.] yet afterwards, when more thoroughly roused to his Duty, he censures himself upon this very Account, as *one of the chief of Sinners, and not worthy to be called an Apostle.* [1 Cor. xv. 9.] And though we are told *he obtained Mercy because he did it ignorantly,* and may charitably hope the same of others; who offend from like mistaken Notions ; yet this should be far from inducing any to be willing to continue in such Mistakes ; since it is indeed the Part of Sincerity, and will be infinitely more to our Advantage to enquire, as this good Man did afterwards, *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do ?* He is now no longer disposed to shut his Eyes, to stifle Conviction, to hold fast Deceit ; but is willing  
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and heartily desirous to know his Duty, and his Master's Pleasure, in the full Extent and Compass of it.

And certainly, *My Brethren*, it behoves us to be very diligent and very conscientious herein. It behoves us, *having received the Love of the Truth that we may be saved*, to search after it with the utmost Care and Impartiality, guarding against *Mistakes* equally on all Sides, and against being led into, or detained in them, through any fleshly Wisdom, through the Love of Ease, or the Affectation of Novelty, or from any corrupt Biass whatever. And, on the other Hand, besides guarding against the usual, and most prevailing Sources of Error, we should be open and free, and ever ready to entertain religious Truths of whatever Kind, whether they are such as are commonly received, yea or no—whether they are such as tend to the Credit and temporal Emolument of those who receive them, or not : For if we are partial in Reference to the *Truths* of Christ, (equally, I suppose, as if we are partial in Reference to his Disciples) and while we receive and entertain one in the most friendly and generous Manner, bid another to *stand off*, to keep its Distance, or sit down under our *Foot-stool* (alluding to St. James—*Ja. ii. 3, 9.*) *we commit Sin and are convinced of the Law as Transgressors.*

Nothing



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Nothing that bears the Stamp of divine Truth upon it, and as such approves itself to the unprejudiced Mind, how disagreeable soever to *former Notions*, or what Pains soever it may cost us to root them out, and bring our present Apprehensions to it, or to what other Disadvantages soever it may expose us, is to be rejected. Should our receiving any such religious Truths become the Occasion of Censure and Strife, and create us ever so much worldly Trouble ; we are not to think that submitting to this is more than our Christian Character and Profession demand ; for Sincerity, in a religious Profession, *certainly*, includes a universal Love of Truth, and a free impartial entire Submission to its Empire.

2. We must likewise use the same Sincerity in *preaching* the Word of God : And not only in forming our Opinion of the several Doctrines of Christianity, but in our Manner also of treating those Doctrines, guard against the Impression of selfish Views, and arm the Mind with strong Resolution for an inviolable Adherence to Truth. *Sound Speech that cannot be condemned*, must be ever made choice of ; without too much Regard had to the Example of *Solomon*, when he tells us “ he sought out *acceptable Words* : ” At least, if we are influenced by it, we should be able to add, as in the same Passage, [*Eccle. xii. 10.*] that  
they

they are *Words of Truth*, and that what is writ, or delivered, is *upright*. For if, otherwise, we *seek to please Men*, we shall not be the *Servants of Christ*; as St. Paul tells us in his own Case, [Gal. i. 10.] *i. e.* He should not approve himself to his great Master, if he made it his main Design to be *acceptable* to his Hearers, to humour their Prejudices in Preference to teaching them the Truth; this would be to conduct himself by the Rules and Maxims of *fleshly Wisdom*, and not by the *Grace of God*. No; *we can do nothing*, says he, *against the Truth, but for the Truth*. [2 Cor. xiii. 8.] *We speak before God in Christ*. [2 Cor. xii. 19.] *We speak not as pleasing Men, but God who trieth our Hearts*. [1 Thes. ii. 4.] *And, seeing we have this Ministry, we have renounced the hidden Things of Dishonesty, not walking in Craftiness, not handling the Word of God deceitfully, but by Manifestation of the Truth commending ourselves to every Man's Conscience in the Sight of God*: [2 Cor. iv. 1, 2.] “To every Man's Conscience” not to their Humours and Prejudices; and “by Manifestation of the Truth,” not by disguising it, not by putting upon it false Colours; this would be to handle the Word of God deceitfully, and not to preach Christ sincerely.

We are not at Liberty, My Brethren, what-  
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ever the great Corrupters of Christianity have done ; we are not at Liberty to represent the Christian Scheme in the Manner that we may conceive would be most to our temporal Advantage. We must not, in our Doctrine, consult *fleshly Wisdom* ; our own Ease, or Reputation, or worldly Interest ; or even what may please our Hearers, and best suits with the Notions they have entertained : But, having examined the Revelation we profess to receive as from God, with all the Diligence, Care, Watchfulness, Seriousness, and Prayer, that are becoming in an Affair of so great Moment, the Result of such Enquiries and painful Searches after the Mind of the Holy Spirit, is now to be brought forth in our publick Ministry ; and, as the Force of Evidence has obliged us to believe, so must we speak. Not as though a Minister were obliged to publish his private Opinion in whatever relates to Religion ; or even in all Matters of some Weight, if they are such as his Hearers and the present Times *cannot yet bear* : Possibly, this may be justified ; provided he does not teach any Thing *contrary* to his private Opinion, or, by any Manner of speaking whatever, *designedly* humour People in Sentiments that are opposite to the Truth, as it lies in his own Mind, upon the maturest Conviction :

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tion : Which cannot, I think, be looked upon as consistent with Sincerity.

And let me only add, under this Head, what though every Body knows, yet is not attended to as it ought, *viz.* That they are not the Additions and the Inventions of Men, which we are to teach and preach, but the Word of God, the Gospel of Christianity, the Truth as it is in Jesus ; and that we should do this, as much as may be, *not in the Words which Man's Wisdom teacheth us, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth ; comparing spiritual Things with spiritual.* [1 Cor. ii. 13.] In Matters of pure Revelation not aiming to be *wise above what is written* ; but in the very Terms we use, and Propositions we form, confining ourselves to the Revelation which has taught them. It had been happy for the Church of God if this necessary and most reasonable Measure had been attended to, as the Neglect of it has produced almost endless Strife and Controversy : *Men vainly puffed up by a fleshly Mind intruding into those Things which they have not seen,* and with the same Haughtiness and Vanity imposing them upon their Brethren ; while the Words of Truth and Soberness, the Words which not Man's Wisdom, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, have had little Regard comparatively paid to them.

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It is a melancholly Consideration, and we should not be unaffected with it, that no more Regard is paid to the Apostle, speaking in this solemn Manner, *I say through the Grace that is given to me to every Man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God hath dealt to every Man the Measure of Faith.* [Rom. xii. 2.] To have obeyed this Precept, and to have kept themselves within the Compass of their Abilities, and of the divine Revelation, would have prevented that Jarring and Schism among the Members of Christ's mystical Body, which has weakened and deformed it more than any one Thing else has done. But to proceed.

3. As we are both to study and preach the Word of God *sincerely*, our View in both being to approve ourselves to God ; so the same *divine Principle* must run through and animate and form our whole *Conversation* ; that it may be such as the Grace of God, and not fleshly Wisdom leads us to, *viz.* plain, open, and without Disguise, modest, humble, candid, aimed at the Glory of God, the Advancement of the Redeemer's Kingdom, and the Salvation of our own and other Men's Souls,

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The Love of *God* must be in us, and it must be in us as a *ruling* Principle ; if it be not supreme its not sincere ; and if it be supreme, it will have a governing Influence upon our *whole Life* ; which, in this Case, will be directed and devoted to his Praise. To honour God, and be accepted of him, will be more to us than every Thing else that can be tho't of. That God may be glorified; and that we may find Grace in his Sight, will put Life and Motion into our Endeavours to spread the Knowledge of God, and to promote the Profession and Practice of true Religion. We shall love *Truth* and *Virtue*, and chearfully lay ourselves out, not only to possess these divine and amiable Qualities ourselves, but likewise to *propagate* them all around us ; employing our most active and unwearied Services for that End. And this will be an high and the best Expression of our Love not only to Truth and Virtue, but also to God and our Neighbour, when we maintain a firm resolved Adherence to the Cause of true and pure Religion ; and make the *promoting* of it the very Business of our Life, as it is of our Office ; *persuaded* that this is *good and acceptable in the Sight of God our Saviour, who will have all Men to be saved, and to come to the Knowledge of the Truth ;* [ 1 Tim. ii. 4 ] and that, whatever it may cost us, he will one Day gloriously reward

reward our Services ; whereas the *Desertion* of this Cause through Fear of any temporal Inconveniences, or from the prevailing Love of this World, will not fail to incur his heavy Displeasure. And if we love God, and love Truth and Virtue, we shall certainly love the Lord Jesus Christ, *who is the Image of God*, a divine Teacher of Truth, and the greatest Promoter of Virtue that ever was ; we shall love him in Sincerity, *above Father or Mother, or even our own Life* ; and this not only on Account of his inherent Excellencies, as being in himself altogether lovely ; but also *because we thus judge, that if he died for all, then were all dead ; and that he died for all, that they which live, should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them and rose again.* [2 Cor. 5, 14.] And how will this induce us to *feed his Sheep, and to feed his Lambs* ? And that any one *should perish for whom Christ died*, with what inward Regret, with what tender, deep Resentment shall we think of it ! What a Spring therefore of Diligence will this be to us, and the Measure of how holy, how wise and regular a Conduct ! For if we love Christ, we shall be careful to *imitate and obey him* : His Pattern of Meekness, Humility, Self-Denial, Diligence in doing and Patience in suffering the Will of God, will lie ever before

us ; and we shall not think of promoting his Honour in Ways that, at the same Time, will discover “ we have not in us the meek, lowly and benevolent Disposition he so constantly expressed ; nor value treading in his Steps, or even obeying his Commands, tho’ we call him Master and Lord, and would be thought to be zealously affected towards him.” Our Lord’s Rebuke to such as these, is very remarkable, *Ye know not what Manner of Spirit ye are of ; for the Son of Man is not come to destroy Men’s Lives, but to save them.* [Luke ix. 56.] The Spirit of Christ is a Spirit of Beneficence, Gentleness and Forbearance ; and if it be in his Ministers, it will shew itself forth in the Meekness of Wisdom, and not in bitter Envy and Strife. Alas ! how many deceive themselves in this Respect ? They think that they are promoting the Honour of Christ ; and imagine that this will warrant and justify any Measures they may go into for that End : But Christ will not be served in forbidden Ways. *Ye are my Friends,* says he, *if ye do whatsoever I command you.* [John xv. 14.] *And he that hath my Commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me.*

If we would approve ourselves Christ’s true and real Friends, and be *great in the Kingdom of Heaven* [Mat. v. 19.] we must faithfully  
study



study the *Laws* of our holy Religion ; and carefully practice them *ourselves*, as well as teach them to the World. We must avoid the fatal Mistake of those who spend the whole Force of their Mind in Speculation, or in promoting the same weak and unprofitable Speculation in *others*, which they so highly value in themselves. It was Our *Saviour's* Doctrine, *if ye know these Things, happy are ye if ye do them.* [*John* xiii. 17.] And in the Nature of Things, Mankind are not to be served by stirring up their Zeal for or against Opinions, of which, after all that can be said, they will have but a very imperfect and inadequate Understanding ; at least, they are not to be served in this Way so much as by teaching them the great Duties of *Piety*, *Righteousness*, and *Sobriety* ; which are easier understood and on the Practice of which, their own Experience will convince them, their present Happiness in a great Measure depends.

Nor need we be shy of promoting, or of laying out our Strength to promote, such a Manner of Conversation as the *Grace of God*, which hath appeared to Men, bringing Salvation, teacheth ; if only we are careful to go before our Flocks in the Example of such a Conversation : And this is a Thing, my Brethren, of more than ordinary Importance  
both

both to our own and our People's Happiness. Therefore the holy Scriptures lay such Stress upon it, that *a Bishop be blameless as the Steward of God, not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to Wine—but sober, just, holy, temperate, [Tit. i. 6, &c.] an Example of the Believers in Word, in Conversation, in Charity, in Spirit, in Faith, in Purity. [1 Tim. iv. 12.]*—It is for a Lamentation, that there should be Offences among us in any of these Kinds, (alas ! so frequent) and thereby not only the Ministry be blamed, but the holy Name and Religion of our great and dear Saviour suffer so much : Especially when we consider that even to be blameless so far (at least in the Eye of the World) is yet short of what both our Duty and our Happiness require : For, as our Obedience, to be sincere, must be universal, *respecting all God's Commands, and shunning every evil and false Way* ; if we only abstain from such *grosser Vices*, which *indulged* would ruin our Reputation, and perhaps endanger our Subsistence ; and, on the other Hand, practise only those *cheaper Virtues*, which expose to no temporal Inconveniences, nor require the Mortification of any favourite Pleasure, or Interest ; we shall, after all, be without any good Evidence of our Sincerity ; and, consequently, incapable of that high Satisfaction and Felicity which St. Paul experienced

perienced in the Evidence of his ; as he tells us in the Text — *Our rejoicing is this, the Testimony of our Conscience, &c.*

Which brings me to the other Branch of my intended Discourse, at this Time, naturally arising upon the Subject before us, *viz.* To consider,

II. The *Rejoicing* that a Foundation is laid for, by the Discharge of our Christian and ministerial Duty, in a sincere Manner, attested by Conscience.

The Manner of Life that has been described, (at least, that is described in the Text) is not only in itself the best and most excellent Kind of Life ; but is, moreover, attended with the greatest Joy and Happiness.

It is that Kind of Life which is most agreeable to the Frame and Constitution of the human Mind ; and which only preserves its Dignity, and the true Order and Harmony of its Faculties. And as it is thus congruous to the reasonable Nature of Man, and tends to his present Perfection ; so it is most for the Honour of God, and most pleasing in *his* Sight : For though a Man cannot be profitable to God, as he that is wise may be profitable to himself ;  
and,

and, agreeably, our Saviour teaches his Disciples, *when ye shall have done all those Things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable Servants, [Luke xvii. 10.]* Yet, as doing our Duty faithfully, and improving the Powers we have received, in the Service assigned us, is the best and surest Expression of our Love to God, unfeigned Submission to his Authority, and of the grateful Sense we have of the Benefits *he* has bestowed upon us, we can do nothing that is more for his Honour: It is, indeed, the only Way in which we are capable of honouring God at all. And as He has said, *Them that honour me, I will honour. [1 Sam. ii. 30.]* This shews the Acceptance of it; nor are the holy *Scriptures* sparing in this Respect; but abundantly declare the high Acceptance of an upright Life with God.—  
*Such as are upright in their Way, are his Delight. [Prov. xi. 20.] His Countenance be- holds them with Pleasure. They dwell in his Presence.* And the like.

And if an upright Life is so pleasing to God, the Man who is conscious of such a Life, must needs have great Freedom towards him; a holy Boldness and Confidence running thro' all his Applications to the supreme Being: He casts his Cares upon God; *believing that He careth for him*; and the Peace of God, which  
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passes all Understanding, keeps his Heart and Mind through Jesus Christ. If he is under the *Censure* of an uncharitable World, that *God* knows his Integrity, will be a sufficient Support. If he is laid on a Bed of Sickness, or is bro't into a near View and Prospect of Death, and can appeal, with good *Hezekiah* ; *Lord, remember how I have walked before thee in Truth, and with a perfect Heart, and have done that which is good in thy Sight.* [Isa. xxxviii. 3.] This will more than make his Bed in his Sickness ; it will disarm the King of Terrors ; and he will step down into the dark Valley, *fearing no Evil* ; his Flesh rests in Hope. *Thou wilt shew me the Path of Life. In thy Presence is Fullness of Joy, and at thy right Hand are Pleasures for ever more.* [Ps. xv. 11.]

This is the Confidence of the upright Man, the Joy of Assurance, a Hope that maketh not ashamed in Life or Death, or before the Tribunal of the great Judge of all. *Herein* (says the Apostle) *is our Love made perfect, that we may have Boldness in the Day of Judgment.* [1 John, iv. 17.] And in another Place, *Little Children, abide in him, that when he shall appear, we may have Confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his Coming.* [1 John ii. 28.] This expresses the greatest Happiness we are capable of in this World ; and the Grounds

Grounds of it follow in the next Verse : *If ye know that he is righteous, ye know, that every One that doth Righteousness is born of him, and consequently is an Heir of God.*

The righteous *Judge* will, *in the great Day*, approve of the Integrity of the upright Man : His Countenance has beheld him with Pleasure all along through the Course of a holy Life, struggling with, and overcoming the Temptations, which would have turned him aside from his Integrity. The good Man, I say, has been all this While a delightful Spectacle to his great Lord and Judge, who will now, at last, pronounce to him those *pleasant Words*,—*Well done, thou good and faithful Servant ; thou hast been faithful in a few Things, I will make thee Ruler over many Things ; enter thou into the Joy of thy Lord.* [Mat. xxv. 21.]

Such an One is *prepared* for Happiness ; his Integrity, his unfeigned Love to God and Christ, his pure, his peaceable, his meek and benevolent Disposition ; these have qualified him for the State and Place of the Blessed ; he has a Relish for the Joys which flow at the divine Right Hand ; having the Love of God in his Breast, the Love of Christ, and the Love of Truth and Virtue ; in Consequence  
of

of which, he is capable of Converse with a holy God, and of supreme Delight therein ; He is capable of a delightful Society and Intercourse with the whole Company of the Blessed ; and therefore, through the Mercy of God, and the Merits of the Redeemer, shall not be denied it. Whereas, without this Integrity, without this sincerely virtuous and good Disposition, whatever other Excellencies a Man may be possessed of, *though he could speak with the Tongues of Men and Angels ; though he understand all Mysteries and all Knowledge ; though he had the Faith of an Apostle, and the Zeal of a Martyr, it would profit him Nothing ; he could not be happy.*

And is a Life *then* of sincere Piety and Virtue, a Life of holy Diligence in the Service of God, and in the Works of our Calling, of such mighty Consequence ? Can the *Consciousness* of it be other than a Foundation of great and continual *rejoicing* ? Who would not rejoice in *that* which is so highly acceptable to God, and which gives such Confidence towards him ? In *that* which the supreme Being himself vouchsafes to speak of with Praise ; and which he always (he tells us) beholds with Pleasure ? Who would not rejoice in *that*, which is not only the surest Consolation of Life, under all its heaviest Pressures, but  
which

which likewise will lighten Death, disarm its Terrors, and make even the Judgment of the Great Day to be thought of with Pleasure? In a Word, Who would not rejoice in *that*, which is the clearest and brightest Expression, that our Nature can bear, of the moral Image of that Being, who is not only the Fountain, but Standard of all Perfection; and which will qualify us, not only for a delightful Converse with him, while here in our Passage through this Vale of Tears; but likewise for a most blissful Abode in his Presence and Kingdom forever; and which, through the Mercy of God and the Merits of the Redeemer, will not fail to bring us to it?

This is a Joy, which, as the World gives it not, so neither can the World take it away; it must be our own Procurement, through the Aids of divine Grace; and we shall enjoy it securely in ourselves. Let the upright Man search his Heart and try his Ways, and his own Conscience will make the Report upon which his rejoicing depends. It has little to do with the *Opinion* that others may have of us; nay, this Joy is of that Sort, that the more the World frowns upon it, the more it increases, and the dearer it grows. Agreeably, the *Time* when St. *Paul* experienced this Joy (as the Context informs us) was *when the*  
*Sufferings*



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*Sufferings of Christ abounded in him; yea, when he was pressed out of Measure, above Strength, insomuch that he despaired even of Life: Nor are the Joys of Uprightness ever felt, ever tasted with more exquisite Pleasure than at such a Time.*

The World may deprive us of our good Name, or of our Possessions; but it cannot deprive us of our Integrity, (if we are resolved to hold it fast) or of the Comfort and Joy that will necessarily arise from a Consciousness of it: No; but this will be so much the greater by how much the more we are aspersed. By how much the more our Prospects with Regard to earthly and temporal Things fail us, by so much the dearer, and of so much more worth and Value, will appear to be that just Confidence in God, which is the Fruit of Uprightness, and that Assurance of his *Almighty Friendship*, which can never fail; and which we shall be sure to enjoy, in despite of all that either Malice or Power can do to deprive us of it, if we hold fast our Integrity. What a brave Resolution then was that—*Till I die I will not remove my Integrity from me; my Righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go. My Heart shall not reproach me so long as I live.* [Job xxvii. 5, 6.]

But I may not enlarge.

A

A just Inference from what has been said, would be — If Sincerity or Uprightness, in studying and preaching the Word of God, and every other Part of a Minister's Conversation, is of so great Importance, *then* their Offence, their Miscarriage is very great, who do any Thing to discourage it ; or to turn Ministers aside, by any Stumbling-Blocks, by any Temptations cast in their Way, from that Simplicity and godly Sincerity, in the Professions of their Faith, in their Manner of treating Christian Doctrines, or in any other Part of their Behaviour, which is so necessary to their Happiness.

But this Inference, of what Weight soever, (and I can't but heartily wish it were seriously attended to ; for, in my Mind, they who offend in this Point, incur heinous Guilt and a heavy Displeasure of the Almighty ; it being the very Crime of which our Saviour, the meekest Person that ever was, yet spake with so much Severity of the Person who is guilty of it, *It were better (says he) that a Millstone were hanged about his Neck, and that he were drowned in the Depth of the Sea. [Mat. xviii. 6.]*) This, I say, with diverse other Uses of the Doctrine, must be omitted, that I may not be tedious ; for the Time will only allow that this, in common with every other good Use

Use that can be made of what has been said, should be enforced in the following brief, but serious Address.

*My Reverend Fathers and Brethren, much respected and dearly longed-for in Christ.*

**S**HALL we be persuaded to be wise and happy? Would to God the Exhortation were needless! Shall we remember that we are Men, (as well as Ministers) and that, in common with the Rest of Mankind, we have Souls to save or lose? Shall we remember that we are mortal—Whoever thought otherwise of himself? Yet, you will *forgive me this Wrong*, if I press you to realize it. Do we not see that wise Men die, as well as that the foolish and brutish perish? The *Fathers—Where are they? and the Prophets, do they live for ever?* The Places that once knew them, and this among others, now knows them no more. Our great and blessed Lord *hath an unchangeable Priesthood, because he continueth ever*; but his Ministers still succeed one another, as *not being suffered to continue by Reason of Death*. [Heb. vii. 23, 24.] Shall we remember *then*, that we have to die; and that after Death there will be a Judgment, an awful, tremendous Judgment?—*For the Lord himself will come, and will both bring to Light the*

## A Convention SERMON. 33

*the hidden Things of Darkneſs, and alſo make  
maniſeſt the Counſels of the Heart. [1 Cor. iv. 4.]*

In Reference to which Judgment, to have *Boldneſs*, as the Apoſtle ſpeaks, *i. e.* good Hope through Grace, and at the Time of it *to have Praise of God*, as every upright Man will ; How great is the *Happineſs* ! and how ſolicit-  
ous ſhould we be to make it our own ! Nay,  
for the preſent, *My Brethren*, are we not in  
a World which, being infected with Sin, and  
overſpread with the Shadows of Death, can  
afford little elſe but a Proſpect of Sorrows ?  
And do we not need *then* the *Conſolations* of  
God, which are not ſmall ? And are we ca-  
pable of theſe, if we are not upright ? Can  
there be Peace, any Peace to that Man, who  
is at Variance with himſelf, and whoſe own  
Heart condemns him ? That we may rely on  
the Friendſhip of Heaven, and aſſure our  
Hearts before God, muſt not Conſcience be  
our Friend, and its Teſtimony be in our Fa-  
vour ? And can this be, if we are not upright ?

In the firſt Place, Will Conſcience approve  
of it, if we are ſlothful and negligent in Re-  
ference to the *Knowledge* of God's Will ; in  
our Endeavours and Purſuits after *that Know-  
ledge* which *all* ſhould *ſeek as Silver and ſearch  
for as hid Treasures* ? Is it not the primary  
Duty of ſuch a Creature as *Man*, to inform  
E himſelf



himself of his *Maker's* Pleasure, by all the Means in his Power ? And is it not the primary Duty of such an *Officer* in the Kingdom of God as the Christian *Minister*, with the greatest Diligence and Impartiality to inform himself of the true and real Contents of that Revelation, which it is his Business to open and unfold to others ? Shall we be able to justify it to ourselves, if we take this upon Trust ? or, Shall we be able to answer it to our Great Lord and Master, if, in Disparagement of the Revelation, which *he* has made, and *God* confirmed with Signs and Wonders, and miraculous Gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own Will, (if in Disparagement, I say, of this divine Revelation) we receive *for Doctrines the Commandments of Men* ? of Men uninspired, and not commissioned to be *Lords* of our Faith, being weak and fallible Men, even as ourselves ? Again,

Will Conscience approve of it if we are careless and indifferent with Respect to what we *teach* ? Are the People obliged, by a divine Command, to *take Heed what they hear*, [Mark iv. 24.] and shall not *Ministers* look upon themselves as under at least an equal Obligation to *take Heed what they preach* ? Shall we serve the Lord, in this Respect, with what costs us nothing ? or, instead of the *sincere Milk of the Word*, which the wise and faithful

ful only desire, *feed* them with *profane and old Wives Fables*, (as the Apostle speaks, 1 Tim. iv. 7—6 Ch. 5 V.—Tit. i. 14. and elsewhere) or with the *Commandments of Men*, who turn aside from the Truth; or with the *perverse Disputings of Men of corrupt Minds*, proud and knowing Nothing, but doting about Questions and Strifes of Words, whereof cometh Envy, Railings, evil Surmises? Alas! my Brethren, what a dreadful Abuse is this of the sacred Oracles, and of the sacred Function! And shall we not then stir up the Gift that is in us, and endeavour to be *Workmen that need not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth?*—Once more,

Will Conscience approve of it, if we are off our Guard, if we are uncircumspect and unexemplary in any Part of our Conversation? Or, if we live in the Omission of Duty so far as will possibly consist with a fair Reputation, or keeping our Places; and only observe those, which require little or no Self-Denial; avoiding whatever that might expose us, for the Sake of God and of a good Conscience, for the Sake of Truth and Virtue, to the Censure and Obloquy of an ignorant and superstitious World? Or, if the Motives we are governed by, and the Springs and Principles of our Actions, are not spiritual, but fleshly; are not heavenly, but earthly?

In

In a Word.—Will Conscience approve of it if in our Aim and earnest Desire we fall any Thing short of a universal Compliance with the whole Will of God ; or rest in any Thing besides the divine Favour and Acceptance ? It is to God, *my Brethren*, and not to Men, that we are to do what we do : Therefore, if we love the Praise of Men more than the Praise of God ; or content ourselves with receiving Honour from our Fellow-Worms, and *seek not the Honour that cometh from God only*, we are not sincere ; we are not sincere good Men ; we may be sincere in our Wickedness, but we are not sincerely virtuous or holy ; and Conscience can in no Wise approve of such Conduct.—Conscience necessarily has a Respect to God ; it judges for and under him, and if we would have its Approbation, the *Truth must be in our inward Parts*.

And let us consider, let us deeply and often consider, how *happy* this will make us. I know you desire to be happy ; the whole Creation thirsts after it. Now the true Secret lies here—*To be good is to be happy* ; and neither Earth nor Hell can separate what God has *so* joined together. If our Way be the Way of Uprightness, it will have the Approbation of *Heaven* ; and this, with the Approbation of Conscience, will secure to us a Happiness that neither Men nor Devils can molest.  
The

The utmost that can be done to us, in this Case, without our own faulty and foolish Consent, is only to hasten us into the Possession of that Happiness, the Consummation of which we are breathing after ; if only our Treasure is in Heaven, and our Heart is *there* ; which is no more than is included in Uprightness.

Beware *then*, my Brethren, of *fleshy Wisdom*, which is indeed the greatest Folly. Men deceive themselves (would to God I could say *Ministers* did not ; they deceive themselves) in the Pursuit of *Pleasure*, or Happiness : They think it lies in the Road of Sense and Appetite, but in the Pursuit, lo ! it flees from them. And where shall <sup>this</sup> divine Form be met with, where shall we be sure to embrace Her ? The holy inspired Writings inform us, and Nature and Reason say the same Thing, **TO BE GOOD IS TO BE HAPPY.** *Let us hear*, says *Solomon*, who had run the Round of sensual Delight, and found all to be Vanity ; let us hear, says he, *the Conclusion of the whole Matter*, after all his Enquiries and all his Experience, *Fear God and keep his Commandments, for this is the WHOLE of Man.* [Eccl. xii. 13.] And, behold ! a Greater than *Solomon* has said, *Seek first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness, and all these Things shall be added unto you.* [Mat. vi. 33.] Nothing can be wanting to the truly good  
and



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and upright Man : The ALMIGHTY, the everlasting God, is his Friend and Father.— He that made and governs the Universe, and in whose Hand it is to make great, to make wise, to make happy, is his Friend and Father ; and shall not all Things *then* work together for his Good ?

If *God* be for us who can be against us ? If he has said, *I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee ; nor suffer any Temptation to befall thee above what thou art able ; and neither Death, nor Life, nor Angels, nor Principalities, nor Powers, nor Things present nor Things to come, nor Height nor Depth, nor any other Creature shall ever separate the truly good Man from the Love of God which is in Christ Jesus his Lord ;* is not this enough, and must it not be the true Way to Happiness ? Yet add to this, the Friendship and the assured good Offices of the great *Saviour*, the appointed Lord and Judge both of the Quick and Dead, and who has it in his Gift to confer a blessed and glorious Immortality, — together with the Esteem and Love of good *Angels* and good *Men* ; and what can be wanting more ?—unless a Man's own Esteem and Approbation of himself ? and this too is the Portion of Uprightness : This is the Crown of all ; not in itself, but as it is *our EVIDENCE* for all the Rest : In which Sense  
I may

I may dare to repeat it, *This is the Crown of all*, and gives the Soul a continual Feast.

Be in Terms *then* with your own Consciences, in Preference to all the World ; and continually advise with them, how you shall behave ; how you shall preach ; how you shall study : But advise not with fleshly Wisdom, carnal Policy, worldly Interest, or the Passions and Appetites of animal Nature. These are all inferior and baser Springs and Principles of Action ; and must be mortified and subdued that the Grace of God may take its Reign, and rule in the Heart ; which it no sooner does, but the Peace of God will rule there too ; and from that Moment the MAN is happy.

You perceive, *my Brethren*, that I consider you as *Men*, and not merely as Ministers.—I have chose to do so, because being Ministers, we are less apt, it may be, to view ourselves in that Light ; when yet, if being entrusted with the Keeping of *others* Vineyards, we neglect our *own* ; and, after we have preached to others, we ourselves should be *Cast-aways*, we are of all Men the most miserable : This God of his infinite Mercy *avert*, as to each one of us, and, on the other Hand *grant* that, being wise and righteous and turning many to Righteousness, we may *shine forth as the Sun in the Kingdom of our Father* ; when all  
*Things*

*Things that offend, and they which do Iniquity, are cast into a Furnace of Fire? Let us strive together in our Prayers, with and for one another that it may be so; by every Mean in our Power, seek to spread the Knowledge of God, the Faith of Christ, the Practice of Virtue, and the Salvation of Souls. Let us aim at this, at home in our several Charges, and while we are together as a Convention, particularly in the Contribution proposed for the Relief of our poorer Brethren, and the Supply of the Word of God in Places destitute of it. Let us, and all, whose Hearts God is pleased to stir up to bear a Part with us, have therein a View to the Honour and Acceptance of Him, who has said, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my Brethren, ye have done it unto me; that so it may be, as St. Paul speaks, upon an Occasion not altogether unlike, an Odour of a sweet Smell, a Sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God; and that he may thereupon supply all our Need, according to his Riches in Glory, by Jesus Christ.*

*Now unto God and our Father be Glory  
for ever and ever.*

AMEN.

